

The Congregational Church of Hollis, NH, UCC
Rev Bob Macfarlane, Interim Minister

Sermon, February 2, 2014
“Peter Powers Pioneer”
Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Once there was a man, a man of unusual courage, who found his way in September of 1730, to the sweet rolling hills and virgin forests about 10 miles west of the Dunstable settlement, where those in authority granted Peter Powers 37 ½ acres in a place called Nissitisset, then still part of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

At age 21, Peter had married Anna Keyes, age 20, and their first two children were Peter Jr, and Stephen. Needing to provide a suitable home for his growing little family, Peter Powers “yeoman” bade his wife Anna and their children farewell, and then proceeded to chop and hack his way through that thick forest, ten full miles, until he arrived at those 37 ½ acres. So it was, that over the next few months through January of 1731, he cleared the land, built a small, one room log cabin with a door and one window and dirt floor. I’m told that you can still see a stone monument to his industry just off Rt 130 west of Hollis.

Peter Powers “yeoman,” had become Peter Powers “Pioneer,” and is credited with being the very first settler in what is now known as Hollis. Peter and Anna are both in well-marked graves in the cemetery just behind the Sanctuary.

So it was that the 200th Anniversary of Hollis was celebrated in 1930, and a book was published to honor that occasion, entitled, aptly enough, with the dust jacket picture on the front of today’s bulletin, ***“Peter Powers Pioneer.”*** I discovered the volume in this past December’s Christmas Fair book sale, and it has helped me a great deal, to learn of your history, and to become familiar with the earliest “DNA” of those pioneers, and of what mettle they were made.

And so over the last few weeks, I have brought that little historical book to each Committee and Board, to the Search Committee, to the Confirmation Class, to our monthly staff meeting, and even to our Newcomers evening. One page I read to all these people, to help them understand who this Peter Powers Pioneer was, and how his vision might impact our own vision as a Church going forward into a new and unknown future. Page 59 which I shall read to you is the first page of the chapter entitled, “The Meetinghouse,” and has everything to do with the relationship between Peter Powers, the calling of the first Hollis Minister, and the founding of your congregation. *(READ Page 59 – at conclusion)

I was especially pleased to have brought this story to your Search Committee, as I told them that as I read of Peter Powers, I thought of them and their search on your behalf for the very best Minister they could find, and the person who might be the right fit for this congregation, to led you into your new future. I explained to the Search Committee, that they ought to consider themselves in a long and unbroken line of committed church folk, from the VERY FIRST Search Committee chaired by Peter Powers himself!

And that HIS vision could be YOUR vision. And HIS courage could be YOUR courage. And HIS faith could be YOUR faith. **Vision** to see a new and creative future; **courage** to be willing to walk new paths of ministry and mission; and the **faith** of our Fathers:

“Faith of our fathers, we will love, Both friend and foe, in all our strife;
And preach thee too, as love knows how, By kindly words and virtuous life.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death.”

Yes, it was a tough life in 1730, as Peter Powers “pioneered” through the forests to become the very first settler in Hollis. No less so, were the pioneers of biblical days, as we read this morning what the prophet Habakkuk had to say about life a few centuries before Jesus. In the first chapter he laments, “How long, O Lord, shall I cry for help? Destruction and violence are before me.” But by the second chapter, Habakkuk is able to say with conviction, and without fear,

“As I stand at my watch post, I hear the Lord saying, ‘Write the vision: make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time, and if it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come. For the righteous live by their faith.’”

So it was for Peter Powers, Pioneer of Hollis, who arrived alone, then brought his wife and two small children, and spent 13 years gathering a community of Christian folk, and saying with Habakkuk I am sure, “How long, O Lord,” before a Search Committee finally offered a Call to The Rev. Daniel Emerson, who courageously himself pioneered a 58 year ministry, and who certainly knew that “The Church’s One Foundation was Jesus Christ her Lord.”

So it is, that a NEW VISION rises among you, a NEW PASSION wells up about you, and a NEW DREAM gushes forth around you. The Pilgrim’s Pastor in 1620 in Leiden, Holland spoke to that vision and passion and dream, as he bid his band of Pilgrims farewell and Godspeed as they set sail for a new land, saying, “There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word.”

Such was Rev. Robinson’s watchword nearly 400 years ago. Such was the hope of this incredible collaboration of Peter Powers and Rev. Daniel Emerson 284 years ago in the new settlement of Hollis. And such can be the passion of this congregation on Monument Square today! Truly, “God is indeed still speaking” in the hearts and souls of God’s people, in this place, in the year of our Lord 2014.

Amen.